



# Brownfields Showcase Community

## East Palo Alto, CA

Outreach and Special Projects Staff (5101)

Quick Reference Fact Sheet

*Brownfields are abandoned, idled or underused industrial and commercial properties where expansion or redevelopment is complicated by real or perceived contamination. In May 1997, Vice President Gore announced a Brownfields National Partnership to bring together the resources of more than 15 federal agencies to address local cleanup and reuse issues in a more coordinated manner. This multi-agency partnership has pledged support to 16 "Brownfields Showcase Communities"—models demonstrating the benefits of collaborative activity on brownfields. The designated Brownfields Showcase Communities are distributed across the country and vary by size, resources, and community type. A wide range of support will be leveraged, depending on the particular needs of each Showcase Community.*

### BACKGROUND

The Brownfields National Partnership has selected the City of East Palo Alto as a Brownfields Showcase Community. East Palo Alto is a small city comprising only 2.5 square miles, with an ethnically diverse population of 25,000; 41% of the population is African American, and 36% is Latino. The city's unemployment rate of 6.6% is nearly three times higher than the county's unemployment rate of 2.6%. Although surrounded by the affluent and high-powered Silicon Valley, East Palo Alto has never enjoyed the prosperity of neighboring communities. The East Palo Alto area has traditionally been used for agriculture, heavy manufacturing, chemical manufacturing, and auto wrecking.

East Palo Alto plans to reverse its fortunes by becoming a true partner in the region's high-tech economy. The city's aggressive efforts toward redeveloping its brownfields has left the Ravenswood Industrial Area (RIA), the city's most significant

brownfield, poised to take advantage of a tight real estate market, and to provide the catalyst for the city to join in the prosperity of the booming regional economy. East Palo Alto targets the 130-acre RIA, awarded an Environmental Protection Agency Brownfields Pilot in 1997, for cleanup and redevelopment. Two other brownfields sites are already well

on their way to redevelopment: the Gateway 101 area is targeted for a large retail center; while a hotel, conference center and retail complex are planned for University Circle. The RIA is planned to be the employment center of the city, slated for office and light industrial uses.

The site is bordered to the north and east by wetlands which are home to two endangered species; an abandoned railroad spur and adjacent residences form boundaries to the south and west.

### CURRENT ACTIVITIES AND ACHIEVEMENTS

In addition to progress in redeveloping two of its three brownfields target areas, East Palo Alto has enjoyed other successes in its efforts to revitalize the com-

#### Community Profile



East Palo Alto, California

East Palo Alto is an historically agricultural community with an ethnically diverse population of approximately 25,000. Restoration of the 130-acre Ravenswood Industrial Area, a city-designated brownfields site, will provide space for high-tech industry employing nearly 4,000 workers.

munity. One of its most significant accomplishments is the creation of the Brownfields Environmental Job Training program, the first training program of its kind in the nation. Of the seventeen students who graduated from the first training class in 1997, nine have full-time positions, and most of the others are working through temporary agencies. Further, with \$25 million anticipated to be spent on redevelopment activities in the city over the next two years, this training will give local residents access to new job opportunities that previously would have been unavailable to them. This program underscores the value of partnerships between local governments, non-profits and federal agencies.

Other highlights of East Palo Alto's brownfields program include:

- Conducting a ten-month sampling study of the RIA which revealed much lower levels of contamination than previously thought, reducing cleanup estimates for the site from \$30 million to \$2-5 million;
- Sponsoring an Environmental and Home Financing Fair to heighten environmental awareness and encourage safe, decent and affordable housing. Participants included government agencies, a medical center, private businesses and other organizations, and the city conducted extensive outreach to encourage residents to attend; and
- Creating a local environmental information brochure in English and Spanish, which has been widely disseminated throughout the community.

East Palo Alto's success is due in large part to the many partnerships it has fostered with federal, state, and local agencies, non-profit organizations, community development groups, academic institutions, and business interests. The city's extensive community outreach activities have ensured that the community's goals for the revitalization of the area are incorporated into final redevelopment plans.

## **SHOWCASE COMMUNITY OBJECTIVES AND PLANNED ACTIVITIES**

East Palo Alto's partnerships with EPA and the Department of Housing and Urban Development have been extremely important and successful. They provide a model for collaborative effort for smaller, ethnically diverse, low-income communities throughout the country where redevelopment of brownfields will address not just a portion of a community, but will bring self-sustainability to the entire community. East Palo Alto's brownfields program serves as a model for small cities with small budgets, where federal and state partnerships make the critical difference.

Strategic planning for redevelopment involves economic, environmental, housing, public health and transportation issues; as a Showcase Community, East Palo Alto will leverage its increased access to federal resources and assistance to address these issues comprehensively.

### **Contacts**

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For more information on the Brownfields Showcase Communities,  
visit the EPA Brownfields web site at:  
<http://www.epa.gov/brownfields/showcase.htm>